



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE

OPEN HEARING

WITH REGIONAL COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF

March 5, 1998

Today the committee continues its hearings with our CINCs. This morning we have with us two CINCs whose troops are engaged in the wide range of missions that have increasingly come to characterize the post-Cold-War world. They are:

- General Wesley K. Clark, commander-in-chief of U.S. European Command; and
- General Anthony C. Zinni, commander-in-chief of U.S. Central Command.

Our witnesses today are responsible for executing among the most pressing military operations facing the United States today. General Zinni must contend with the latest twists and turns in the Persian Gulf. General Clark, on the other hand, faces the difficult task of managing the demands of an open-ended peacekeeping commitment in Bosnia as well as the uncertain requirements of expanding an evolving NATO alliance in the years ahead.

Not surprisingly, the crisis in the Gulf has occupied our attention these past few weeks. Despite the current pause in the crisis, it is probably only a matter of time before the next confrontation with Saddam. Based on what I know of the recent UN brokered "deal," I am concerned that Saddam increasingly has the initiative and is a step closer to escaping sanctions and proceeding even more aggressively with his program to develop weapons of mass destruction. Surveying developments in and around the Gulf over the past few months paints a disturbing picture:

- The Gulf War coalition is in tatters. France and Russia appear to be openly challenging U.S. leadership in the region.
- Many of our Arab allies seem to be questioning our commitment to solve the Iraqi problem and perhaps even our ability to protect them.
- The Administration appears to have retreated from previous U.S. policy that Saddam Hussein must not be allowed to develop weapons of mass destruction to a policy of hoping to degrade and delay their development.

- And most worrisome, an air-land campaign and extended occupation of Iraq, if ultimately necessary to resolve the Iraq problem, may be beyond the capabilities of our smaller and overextended military today.

And by no means is the Iraq problem General Zinni's only challenge. Despite the election of less radical leaders in Iran, the current Islamic regime still seeks weapons of mass destruction and continues its sponsorship of international terrorist organizations making it perhaps a greater long-term threat to U.S. interests in the region than even Iraq.

General Clark's plate is also full. The question of the U.S. mission in Bosnia may have been eclipsed on the evening news by the crisis in Iraq, but the President has extended the commitment of U.S. ground troops in Bosnia in order to assist with the building of democracy in the Balkans – something that has never existed in that part of the world.

It is no secret that I have opposed the presence of large U.S. ground forces in Bosnia. While I think there is a significant role for the U.S. military to play in Bosnia, I believe that U.S. ground forces ought to be kept “over the horizon” while our military does what it is uniquely qualified to do – logistics, communications, intelligence and perhaps air cover. Despite my reservations, I believe Congress will endorse — albeit reluctantly — an extended U.S. troop presence in Bosnia. Assuming that is the case, I am deeply disturbed by the widespread rumor that the planned downsizing of the extended U.S. troop presence in Bosnia is being implemented in an attempt to “appease Congressional critics” of the Administration's policy.

Despite my long-standing reservations, if U.S. troops are to stay in Bosnia, we ought to adhere to the Powell Doctrine of overwhelming, not just adequate, force. From a force protection perspective, we should not cut corners. And from a mission perspective, if the Administration believes that U.S. troops are essential to the mission (whatever that is), then it ought to ensure that our forces in Bosnia are robust enough to get the job done – so they can get out that much sooner. If true, the notion of downsizing our ground presence in Bosnia to appease Congress is an insult, and furthermore, it is not a success oriented strategy.

And if Bosnia is not challenging enough, General Clark also is facing the task of managing the expansion of NATO, incorporating into the alliance armies who were once our enemies and extending U.S. security guarantees eastward into Central Europe. This will mean new borders to defend, but with fewer U.S. troops to defend them.

Which brings me back to where I began at yesterday's hearing. By the time this hearing concludes, we will have had a worldwide tour of U.S. military horizons – from the Pacific Rim, to the Korean peninsula, around the United States, to Europe and Africa and the Persian Gulf. We will have heard about a variety of threats – threats posed by small terrorist organizations and bands of ethnic cleansers, regional aggressors armed with ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, and even the possibilities of future great-power challenges. The soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines that our CINCs command have a lot to do – and the missions grow every day.

General Clark, General Zinni, you help to lead the most capable military the world has ever seen, but the risk to the viability of our forces grows everyday. I hope you will address the issue of how much risk is too much? And how much longer we can ask the troops you command to do more with less?